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Human wrongs and international relations

KEN BOOTH

*The following is an edited text of the second John Vincent Memorial Lecture delivered at Keele University on 6 May 1994.**

The camera always lies. We all know that childhood holidays were not always sunny, or full of smiles, but the material (photographic) evidence now suggests otherwise. We know that the camera always lies, yet we conspire to believe the opposite. We conspire to believe that the camera objectively records the truth; the cliché asserts that it never lies. This is the meaning of the beguiling words on the opening page of Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*: 'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking.'¹ These words express one version of the role of academic students of international relations: we are engaged in 'recording', in some sense passively (and certainly not emoting). Like the supposedly neutral instrument of the camera, we are supposed to represent and transmit the facts before us.

Family snapshots and social science have both been sustained by positivist assumptions. If positivism rules in these areas of life, as it is usually thought to in natural science, does this mean that people are congenital positivists? Or is something more complex going on? I think that the latter is the case, and that it has something to do with the relationship between the world 'out there' (often called 'the real world') and the world 'in here' (the world we conceive within our heads). The world 'in here' is made up of pictures we want to see and need to see, and pictures we do not want to see and perhaps do not need to see. As a result of this, and of associated psychological/perceptual/cognitive inter-relationships, even the apparently objective instrument of the camera lies. Not only does it cause the object at which it is pointed to change, it excludes; and it also allows a variety of stories to be told.

* The author wishes to acknowledge the helpful comments of Timothy Dunne, Richard Wyn Jones and Nicholas J. Wheeler.

Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972; first publ. 1939), p. 7.

When academics move from their lives outside the campus to their jobs on campus, they do not cease to be the same people who take family snaps. And I want to begin by proposing that the academic study of international relations has shared some characteristics of this branch of positivist popular art. People are not congenital positivists, but many are congenital self-deceivers,² and positivism is a subconscious servant of the deception.

Global family snaps

In 1994 the academic discipline of international relations celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of its institutional founding, at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. There, in the Department of International Politics, John Vincent and I were students at the same time in the early 1960s. Like other students in the Anglo-American world, what we embarked upon at that time, though we did not realize it any more than our teachers, was a course in global family snaps.

Whether the subject-matter is one's family or the whole of humankind, most people do not really seem to mind illusion; and if the illusion can be hidden by positivist veils, so much the better. After all, self-deception does not work unless it is effective deception. Look around, and it soon becomes apparent that in many areas of life people prefer illusion to reality. And just as family snaps help us tell different (and sunnier) family stories from the daily routines of life, so international relations snapshots change, exclude and massage reality. Under the guise of 'telling it as it is', academic international relations allows us (the Anglo-American masculinist dominators of the subject) to play up to the images we have of ourselves as civilized, intelligent and heroic people. The picture taken by international relations realists adds colour by insisting that this is 'the best of all possible worlds', and gives power and meaning by insisting upon war as its central focus. In these ways the subject contributes to the stories in which we want to live, rather than to a confrontation with the facts of the daily lives of much of humanity. To change my analogy: academic international relations too often performs the function of the Prozac of the human sciences. It has proved to have mind-adjusting qualities which help us better adapt to the realities of the world by suppressing or avoiding them. International relations Prozac consoles in some areas, and energizes in others, but its overall effect is to obstruct its takers from facing up to and dealing with what the great mass of humanity, and the rest of the natural world, need to survive passably well.

After seventy-five years of academic international relations, and on the brink of what threatens to be the most tumultuous century in world history—in terms of our capacity for the destruction of nature and of civilized life—the discipline needs to confront a series of profound questions. What (on earth) do we think we have been doing for the past three-quarters of a century? And what do we

² See, for example, Brian P. McLaughlin and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, eds, *Perspectives on self-deception* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

think we are doing now? Are the reasons we give for what we think we do, and the way that we do it, the same as the actual causes that shape our behaviour? What functions—social, political and psychological—does this discipline serve in the evolution of human society on a global scale? Why did this particular discipline take so long to invent (compared with the other social sciences), and if it had not been invented, would we reinvent it now? If so, would we reinvent it in the same form? How tied are we to the myths of our own disciplinary foundations? Are we the vehicles for an exercise in global self-deception—global family snaps? I have recently started to think more critically about some of these questions, and have come to what for a teacher of the subject may seem a disturbing set of answers.

My thinking about these questions has been stimulated by reading Clément Rosset's account of the state of philosophy. In his book *Joyful cruelty* he argues that the development of his own discipline can be interpreted as 'an escape from the real'.³ In its escapism, Rosset argues, contemporary philosophy often appears to have nothing better to do than endlessly interpret the texts of philosophical tradition. It revels in exegesis, 'totally oblivious to what exists'.⁴ He describes philosophic truth as a 'hygienic order'.⁵ In a key sentence he writes: 'The experience of the world is literally unbearable, and philosophy has traditionally come to the rescue to save humanity from meaninglessness, to create the illusion of a truth which would remove us from the suffering necessarily entailed by an encounter with the real.'⁶

Rosset's points about the study of philosophy drive right to the heart of mainstream Anglo-American international relations. In the self-generated and Higher Education Funding Council-driven cascade of word processing that measures our output and defines our merit, an overwhelming amount of 'research' comprises books about books, articles about articles and papers about papers. International relations libraries are full of self-referential texts, as the academic appetite grows on what it feeds upon. This is a scholarly dance in which there will never be a Last Waltz. The dominant tune remains that of neo-realism, a bright-as-a-button example of a 'hygienic order'. The hygienic order of neo-realism is one manifestation of the 'escape from the real' in the subject of international relations, since international relations—the subject-matter—is everything but a hygienic order. The subject-matter consists of flesh (which is fed or famished) and blood (which is wet and messy, and hot or cold), and people living lives comfortably and securely, or enduring them against the wall, like a dog.⁷ One does not have to be a radical feminist to see the neo-realist subject as the work of the minds of men, and the subject-matter as the lives of women.

³ Clément Rosset, *Joyful cruelty: toward a philosophy of the real*, ed. and trans. David F. Bell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁷ The latter simile follows Albert Camus, 'Neither victims nor executioners', first published in *Combat*, 1946, reprinted in Peter Meyer, *The pacifist conscience* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), pp. 423–39.

A 'cult book' was recently defined on a radio programme as one that leaves the reader with nowhere to hide. By this standard, academic international relations does very badly. Our classic texts are not in the first rank of the century's writing, and there are no more than a handful of books out of the countless millions of words written about the subject over the past seventy-five years which leave us nowhere to hide. Attempting to confront the global real, and leave us nowhere to hide, is what I think should motivate our work.

Frank Zappa, another like John Vincent who died too young, was the mother of insights into life which were as inventive as his music. He used to question the calculation of scientists that hydrogen is the most plentiful substance in the universe. It is not hydrogen, Zappa insisted: it is stupidity. One sometimes looks at the condition of the global nest and believes that he may have been right. Coming a close second in human traits must be self-deception, denial, the absence of self-awareness, and that whole thesaurus of similar attitudes which I am attaching to the way the academic study of international relations has evolved. It seems to be part of the human condition that we can only take a certain amount of reality at a time. This can be easily illustrated from the literature of the subject, and from the events of international history.

We generally try to make war fit for polite society. This is why Paul Fussell's book *Wartime* is such a valuable and indeed original contribution to the literature of the Second World War. His writing was partly driven by the memory of Walt Whitman's awareness of the gap between what he had seen and heard himself, and the sanitized stories of the American Civil War that emerged in public. 'The real war will never get in the books', Whitman declared. Fussell tried to meet this criticism with respect to the world war in which he himself had fought.⁸ Nowhere has mass denial been more evident than in the attitudes and behaviour which created and sustained the superpower nuclear confrontation between the late 1940s and late 1980s. The Cold War must go down as history's Great Escape. The real danger of catastrophic human suffering beyond imagination was tamed into the hygienic order of nuclear strategy. Even now we have not left the valley of the shadow of nuclear weapons; yet most of us try not to think about them—and certainly not think of them ever going off.

International history records many examples of leaders, with a range of different personalities, showing that they cannot stand too much reality. There was nice and safe Stanley Baldwin, the British Prime Minister in the mid-1930s, who told an adviser that he did not want to know the exact figures about German air superiority, lest he not be able to sleep soundly at night.⁹ There was the brutal dictator Josef Stalin, who hid away for several days after he first heard of the Nazi invasion of his country in June 1941.¹⁰ And there was the story

⁸ But by his own account he did not—indeed could not—succeed: see Paul Fussell, *Wartime: understanding and behaviour in the Second World War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 290 and *passim*.

⁹ The example is discussed in Robert Jervis, *Perception and misperception in international politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 172–3.

¹⁰ Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and coexistence: the history of Soviet foreign policy 1917–67* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), pp. 315–16.

about the tough-as-old-boots US President, 'LBJ', who is supposed to have shouted to his people to try to get the pictures of what he called 'starving nigger babies' off TV screens during the Biafran War of 1969. We have no reason to suppose that leaders are any different today. President Bush and Prime Minister Major in 1991 initially wanted to avert their eyes from the calamity confronting the Kurds in Iraq—part of the messy flesh and blood aftermath of the hygienic order of Desert Storm. The Western leaders were prevented from ignoring the Kurds only by the media attention given to the unfolding tragedy, and the subsequent political costs they would have had to pay had their eyes continued to be averted.¹¹

The point being illustrated by these examples was underlined perfectly by a recent full-page Amnesty International advertisement about the massacres and human rights violations which have been carried out by agents of the Indonesian state in East Timor since 1975—and the hypocritical Western responses which followed.¹² Dominating the page is a picture taken at the height of the November 1991 massacre at Dili, the capital of East Timor, when about 250 unarmed people were killed. Under the picture is the headline: *HOW EMBARRASSING*. The accompanying text describes the complicity of the 'quiet diplomacy' of governments, and of the tendency of people to turn away when organizations such as Amnesty 'shout and scream' about such massacres. How embarrassing indeed. People, and especially governments, find it discomfiting to be confronted by representations of world politics which tell stories contrary to their nurtured self-images. We in the West do not like our caring, comfortable, consumerist—and conniving—noses rubbed into international reality too much.

The argument so far would seem to support the proposition that the subject of international relations constitutes what Mary Midgley calls one of the 'special lies that people tell themselves and each other to justify doing unjustifiable things'.¹³ The unjustifiable in this case is the human failure to attend more effectively to the many wrongs which constitute some of the dominating facts of politics on a global scale, and to the particular Western contribution (by design or inadvertently) to making matters worse. I intend to assert that these wrongs are facts in the same spirit as Geoffrey Warnock, who contests the simple (simplistic) distinction between 'facts' and values'. He argues: 'That it is a bad thing to be tortured or starved, humiliated or hurt, is not an opinion: it is a fact. That it is better for people to be loved and attended to, rather than hated or neglected, is again a plain fact, not a matter of opinion.'¹⁴

¹¹ The episode is discussed in James Mayall, 'Non-intervention, self-determination and the "new world order"', *International Affairs*, 67: 3, July 1991, pp. 421–30.

¹² Amnesty International, 'How embarrassing', *Guardian*, 12 March 1994, p. 11.

¹³ Mary Midgley, *Wisdom, information and wonder: what is knowledge for?* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 98.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Warnock, *Contemporary moral philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 60; this position is endorsed by Midgley, *Wisdom*, pp. 154–63.

Human wrongs may be plain facts, but they are not necessarily plain political truth. On the whole, citizens of Western liberal democracies have a high opinion of their moral standing. It is not wholly justified, despite the great amount of good work that is practised. When we contemplate global human wrongs today, we in the West are more culpable than at least some of those we claim to embody evil. Hitler, for example, did not treat other races with equal dignity because he did not believe them to be equal. To Hitler the Jews, Slavs, blacks and the rest were not deserving of humane treatment because they were not fully human in his world view. Such an argument has justified a variety of wrongs down the centuries (treating others as means and not ends, and making them utterly vulnerable to life's pains). At the sharp edge, in war, enemies have often been dehumanized to make it easier to kill them. In more refined times, brilliant Greek philosophers pondered the good life, while living off the backs of slaves. So did an educated man like Thomas Jefferson, while creating a constitution committed to the inalienable rights of man. At least by their own lights, these people were not hypocrites; but we in the West today frequently are, and the technologically shrunken world denies us the comfort of ignorance. We look, daily, at the agony of Africa. We *know* and we are supposed to value. How do our intelligent and caring minds cope with so many human wrongs? In today's wired world we have nowhere to hide, except in our own minds. Consequently we weave stories which help us choose our wrongs selectively. This is where the discourse of international relations plays a role.

The reason we give for studying international relations in the way we do may not be the same as the actual causes. If asked what we 'do', most of us would probably say that we try to describe, explain and possibly forecast relations between states. But does that formulation adequately account for the function we have been carrying out down the years for society? I think not. Consider the actual social roles performed by academic international relations:

- We have provided fetishizers of Foreign Offices. The research citadel of the Public Record Office is a continuation of realism by other means.
- We have provided therapists for the captains of slave ships¹⁵ (consoling them that theirs is a contextual morality, an inescapable predicament).
- Rather than face up to the present and the fragile bubble of the future, we have provided a type of 'heritage' international relations. The result is a sort of Merchant-Ivory escapism into the history of when times seemed simpler.
- We have provided Job's comforters. The subject has been dominated by fatalists about human nature or political structures whose 'explanations' add to our sorrows by their verdicts that our destinies are inescapable.

¹⁵ By which I mean something similar to A. J. P. Taylor's 'chaplains of the pirate ship' (quoted in Piers Brendon, 'Quite contrary', *New Statesman and Society*, 21 January 1994, p. 38). In the fleet of states, however, there have been many more slave ships than pirate ships.

- We have provided house-trained ‘critics’ of the powerful. These, like the lawyers Kant criticized,¹⁶ always adjust to their rulers’ agendas, and flatter the power which is ruling.
- We have provided the Eichmanns of Armageddon. These are the strategists in their nuclear counting houses, who rationalize the inhuman.

Many of us have conspired and conspire in such roles, more or less unthinkingly. Our medium is the message.

Is it good enough? Is it good enough to describe selectively, to explain tautologically, to constitute common-sensically, to be the philosophical agents of the geography of our citizenship, and to give intellectual comfort to what history might conclude are ‘false necessities’?¹⁷ I believe that it is not good enough, and that the subject is due for reinvention. We always have choices, whatever the necessitous spirit of realism says, and the role of an Eichmann of Armageddon is mean and demeaning. I speak as somebody who once performed it—simply obeying academic orders, like many international relations students of my time. Eventually I suffered what some colleagues regard as a severe professional disorder, the symptoms of which involve believing that the study of international relations can gain more from studying Foucault than NATO. The subject is in need of reinvention, but this first requires the reinvention of its teachers. The theme of the reinvention should be ‘global moral science’.

Global moral science

The phrase ‘global moral science’ has some problems, but it is an apt description of what is required of our subject at the end of one era and at the beginning of another, and a predictably tumultuous one at that. The phrase ‘moral sciences’ used by David Hume over 200 years ago referred to the scientifically based group of subjects which sought to understand the human condition as a prelude to human emancipation from ignorance, traditional social relations, superstition and the rest.¹⁸ It is his phrase upon which I want to build. The nineteenth century has been called the century of history, and the twentieth century that of philosophy.¹⁹ To my mind the twenty-first will be the century of ethics, and global ethics at that. What I would like to see is a shift in the focus of the study of international relations from accumulating knowledge about ‘relations between states’ (what might be called the ‘dismal science’ of Cold War international relations) to thinking about ethics and applied ethics on a global

¹⁶ Immanuel Kant, ‘Perpetual peace’, in Hans Reiss, ed., *Kant’s political writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 114–15.

¹⁷ The phrase is from Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *False necessities: anti-necessitarian social theory in the service of radical democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁸ For a sound and accessible survey of the origins of the social sciences see Peter Hamilton, ‘The Enlightenment and the birth of social science’, in Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, eds, *Formations of modernity* (Oxford: Polity, 1992), pp. 18–58.

¹⁹ Jean d’Ormesson’s view, quoted in Paul Royall, ‘Foucault’s fictions’, *Philosophy Now*, No. 6, Summer 1993, p. 39.

scale. This means—*contra* Martin Wight—the study of security *and* the good life of the world.

Let me explain the three elements in the phrase. What is needed must be *global* because—like practitioners and students of geography and sociology²⁰—we must recognize under conditions of globalization the limits of state-centric perspectives. Clearly, though, the study of relations between states will play an important empirical part in any global moral science. What is needed must have *moral* at its centre because the fundamental questions of how we might and can live together concern values, not instrumental rationality. The tactics and strategies of diplomats and soldiers are derivative of philosophies (whether they recognize it or not) which have ethical foundations. We all live our lives within theories—such as democracy, capitalism, masculinity or nationalism—which have moral dimensions as well as material consequences. Students sometimes describe their efforts in the seminar room—as if it were a self-evident virtue—as ‘apolitical’. But to be ‘apolitical’ is actually to be the opposite of what is imagined; it is to adopt a very distinctive political (and emotional) posture.²¹ It is also one which leaves power where it is. When students realize this, they are prone to have an out-of-anorak experience. What they grasp is that when they come into the seminar room they do not leave their lives on the coat-hook outside, along with their anoraks, but that they bring them in with them. An individual might try to step outside a theory to criticize it, but then does so from within another. There is no escape from theory, or from debates about values. As John Fekete has argued: ‘we live, breathe and excrete values.’²² What is needed might also—but more controversially—be called *science*. What I mean here is the original broader meaning of the term, namely organized thought as opposed to testing. This is still largely its meaning in continental Europe.²³

To describe the reinvented subject of international relations as global moral science rather than the discipline of relations between states does not imply that all teaching and all research should be devoted to ‘theory’ and to ‘ethics’ in particular. Instead, I am suggesting that we test what we study against what is needed to think about global moral science for the twenty-first century. This will mean more sociology than strategy, more macro-history than micro-diplomatic history and more paradigms than power politics. Global moral science is not a threat to international relations; it is rather a key to opening up a subject that has become constipated, so that it will be possible for it to engage the real in a way that it was never allowed to do in its supposedly realist phase.

²⁰ See, respectively, David N. Livingstone, ‘Lost in space’, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 11 March 1994, p.15; and Mary S. Archer, ‘Sociology for one world: unity and diversity’, *International Sociology*, 6: 2, 1991, pp. 131–47.

²¹ For a critique of ‘apolitical’ thinking, see Charles A. McCoy and Alan Wolfe, *Political analysis: an unorthodox approach* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1972).

²² Quoted in Jeffrey Weeks, ‘Rediscovering values’, in Judith Squires, ed., *Principled positions: postmodernism and the rediscovery of value* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), pp.189–211 at p. 189.

²³ See Midgley, *Wisdom*, p. 112.

One well-known conceptualization of globalization talks of 'ethnoscapes', 'technoscapes', 'finanscapes', 'mediascapes' and 'ideoscapes'.²⁴ These refer, respectively, to flow across (imagined) world landscapes of persons, technology, capital, information and ideologies. These global flows and landscapes are evocative images, but they do not leave explicit space for what I believe will be the terrain of the most interesting questions in the social sciences—those concerning ethics and applied ethics on a global scale (what might be called the 'ethicscape' of the twenty-first century).

Even non-Marxists will probably accept that there is a relationship between values and material circumstances. It was easier to change attitudes to slavery once machines were invented which reduced the need for cheap and plentiful human labour. The ready availability of contraception tends to alter attitudes towards sex. Marriage vows alter their meaning when changes in life expectancy entail the prospect of couples living together for two or three times longer than in the distant past, when these social norms were established. Values tend to change with circumstances, and it is a safe prediction that the changes in global circumstances in the next century will be greater than any in history. Key forces are already on the move, not least what might be called the four Western bourgeois horsemen of the apocalypse: 'possessive individualism', 'consumer democracy', 'the capitalist world economy' and 'unconstrained science and technology'.²⁵ Together with these pressures there are the compelling figures regarding population increase, pressure on resources and pollution. (Sixty years ago there were about 2 billion people on earth. That figure had taken in the region of 250 million years to reach. Today we are 5.6 billion. By 2025 there could be 10 billion of us and we may tail off in the second half of the century at 8–12 billion.²⁶ Some—not necessarily alarmists—say it could be 17 billion.) We think there are a lot of us crowding the earth now (except for the Pope and fellow family unplanning fundamentalists in his own and other faiths) but the most awesome fact is that *the main surge in world population is yet to come*. The signs are that there will be a greater population increase in the next sixty years than in the last 250 million.²⁷

We have barely begun to grasp the political, social and economic implications and possibilities of this most radical change in the world's material circumstances. It is not difficult to imagine some of the particular things it will mean: '100 mile cities' embracing all social and economic possibilities,²⁸ the disappearance of natural wild places, global media, the drastic reduction in plant life available for all non-human species, further erosion of the earth's precious but vulnerable skin of soil, shortage of fresh water, and so on. What it is difficult to imagine are the full implications of the manifold interactions of these trends in dynamic political settings and to societies already under varieties of strain.

²⁴ Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy', in Mike Featherstone, ed., *Global culture: nationalism, globalization and modernity* (London: Sage, 1990), pp. 295–310.

²⁵ Michael McGwire has been prominent in arguing about the future global significance of these factors.

²⁶ Christine Gorman, 'Planned planethood', *Time*, 9 May 1994, p. 55.

²⁷ Norman Myers, *The Gaia atlas of future worlds* (London: Gaia Books, 1990), p. 38.

²⁸ See Stuart Wilks, '100 mile cities', *New Times*, London, 16 April 1994, p. 9.

How are we to think about all the pressures and problems? What do the extensive libraries of international relations, built up over seventy-five years, tell us?

Nothing is certain, except that the middle of the twenty-first century will be radically different from the past, and that we will be there by the time some of the students reading this article are celebrating their grandchildren's twenty-fifth birthdays. If this world (where there will be nowhere to hide) is to offer reasonable lives for a reasonable number of people, then we need a new rationality, new axioms, new agents, new forms of politics and a new discourse. In this regard I believe Derek Parfit is correct in his view that both human history and the history of ethics may be just beginning. Very few people have made non-religious ethics their life's work, he points out, and so argues that it is possible to have high hopes for progress in ethics.²⁹ This is where we—specialists in the study of international relations/world politics—can hope to make a contribution, with our interests in theory and practice, our empirical skills and our global agenda. Our discipline is the logical academic site for the study of global moral science, and as such can claim to be the subject of all subjects in the social sciences.³⁰

Global moral science needs a different discourse and sensibility from Cold War international relations; and it is here that John Vincent's contribution becomes important. In his main areas of interest—human rights and non-intervention—he helps us with the concepts and sensibilities necessary to think about the ethicscape of the twenty-first century.³¹

Human rights

Human rights issues will run through the debates about who should and will be secure, how far community should and will spread, and who should and will be emancipated. Basic to these human rights issues, as John Vincent always stressed, is the matter of different cultural conceptions. At the same time, however, he also emphasized the existence of universal 'basic rights' and saw that they were increasingly shared in world society.³² I want to push the cosmopolitan arguments about human rights much further in the unfolding ethicscape. This project generally attracts three sets of critics: (1) those for whom such a project seems both foolhardy and anachronistic in these 'post-modern' times; (2) those who see it as an imperialistic project, at a time when we are supposed to be sensitive to charges of Western ethnocentrism, especially the tendency to cloak

²⁹ Derek Parfit, *Reasons and persons* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), esp. pp. 453–4.

³⁰ On this, see Ken Booth, 'Dare not to know: international relations theory versus the future', in Ken Booth and Steve Smith, eds, *International relations theory today* (Oxford: Polity, 1994), pp. 328–50.

³¹ John Vincent's main works are *Non-intervention and international order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974) and *Human rights and international relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1986).

³² Vincent, *Human rights and international relations*, esp. pp. 127–8.

particular interests and values in universalist language; and (3) those who regard any cosmopolitan project as philosophically naive and politically unwise, since they themselves are ultra-cautious about acting on problems until they are confident that their knowledge is sound and their principles perfectly grounded. Each of these (overlapping) sets of critics deserves a longer reply than is possible here. I will deal with the last two first, and briefly, and then give a more considered response to the post-modern/relativist critics.

Philosophical sceptics, for whom nothing is certain, and so for whom the bases of action are always problematic, are a familiar feature of academic life. Tom Stoppard enjoyably caricatured them in his clever comedy *Jumpers*, and in particular in the scene in which philosophical sceptics were discussing whether the train for Bristol left yesterday from Paddington station.³³ On what basis could they ever know? Even if they were actually on the train that was supposed to leave for Bristol, might not the happening be explained by Paddington leaving the train? We all know such conundrums, and indeed such people. Meanwhile, flesh is being fed or famished, and people are being tortured or killed. And even philosophical sceptics have to catch trains. Some of them do. Unless academics are merely to spread confusion, or snipe from the windows of ivory towers, we must engage with the real. This means having 'the courage of our confusions' and thinking and acting without certainty.

In reply to those sensitive to post-colonial critiques of Western imperialism I would argue that just because many Western ideas were spread by commerce and the Gatling gun, it does not follow that every idea originating in the West, or backed by Western opinion, should therefore simply be labelled 'imperialist' and rejected. There are some ethnocentric ideas—and individual human rights is one of them—for which we should not apologize. Furthermore, I do not see the dissemination of powerful social and political ideas as necessarily occurring in one direction only. As the economic and political power of Asia grows, for example, so will its cultural power. World politics in the next century will be more Asian than the present one. What matters from a cosmopolitan perspective is not the birthplace of an idea, but the meaning we give it.

Finally, what about the post-modern, or relativist critique of cosmopolitanism? This attack contains a strongly held set of arguments, but they are flawed. Indeed, I want to argue for building a cosmopolitan politics on the very inadequacy of the post-modern/relativist position. There are five main reasons for disagreeing with the view that values, like some wine, do not travel.

First: history. Being philosophically prim about relativism does not wash, because values are promiscuous, as Jan Aart Scholte has persuasively argued. For proof of this, one only has to look at the history of social change in the past.³⁴ Against the prim notion that values are from 'somewhere', and so belong

³³ The nuggets to be mined from this play are recalled in Hadley Arkes, *First things: an inquiry into the first principles of morals and justice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. ix.

³⁴ Jan Aart Scholte, *International relations of social change* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1993), pp. 33–4.

there—a curious anthropological logic—I would argue that cultures are ‘made in the world’, like our gadgets these days. Scholars from several parts of the world, for example, have asserted their cultures’ claim to have ‘invented’ human rights. As part of UNESCO’s 1947 survey on the origins and possible universal nature of human rights, a Chinese philosopher argued that the idea of human rights had taken shape very early in the Middle Kingdom, based on the recognition of all individuals having equal desires and equal rights; and an Islamic philosopher from India argued that the ideas of democratic theory from which Western ideas of human rights had supposedly sprung had long been accepted in Islam.³⁵

Second: the problem of authenticity. Relativists reject the search for universal foundations (archimedean points). I do not disagree with this, but I do find it strange that this critique assumes that archimedean points exist in those things called ‘cultures’ or ‘societies’. ‘Authenticity’ is the label applied to these points, but cultural authenticity is the product of historical social power, not some cultural ‘truth’. What is ‘authentic’ in a culture? This is a crucial question in human rights issues, affecting decisions on particular questions such as population control and the broadest meaning of emancipation. The debate about authenticity generally takes place at the level of texts and interpretation, but at base it is about the distribution of political/cultural power. Cultural authenticity—one of a society’s ‘archimedean points’—is not a fact, it is an interpretation; and what prevails at any period is not some absolute truth. The point here is to stress not the certainty of power, but the uncertainty of authenticity. Even within the relatively narrow bounds of the Church of England, look at the fifteen-year-long debate about women priests, in part to discover what is authentic in Anglicanism. Look at the different traditions appealed to within Islam over the call to kill Salman Rushdie (and let us call a spade a spade, and not an ‘affair’, and let us give him his first name, to make him seem one of us, and not a convict). Look at the recent debate in the British Jewish community as to whether there is any such thing as Jewish sperm.³⁶ Some of the arguments in some of these debates are offensive and regressive; but, most importantly for present purposes, they show that intelligent and knowledgeable groups from within particular cultures or traditions are unable to agree on the authentic foundations on which to settle key cultural questions.

Authenticity is not just about cosy traditional cultural practices like the *gorsedd* in Wales—the honorary circle of druids (which proves that there is nothing so authentic as a recently invented tradition³⁷). Authenticity can be cruel and traditionalist, favouring old ways for their own sake. About 100 million females in the world are said to be the victims of the traditional cultural practice of

³⁵ Rainer Tetzlaff, ed., *Human rights and development: German and international comments and documents* (Bonn: Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden, 1993), p. 19.

³⁶ Jay Rayner, ‘There is no such thing as Jewish sperm’, *Guardian*, 29 January 1994.

³⁷ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), *passim*.

genital mutilation. Culture can be torture,³⁸ and 'authenticity' the means of maintaining oppressive power structures. The politics of relativism can too easily become the politics of 'Back to Basics', and many of us (except, seemingly, for John Major's small band of true-blue believers) know what 'Back to Basics' campaigns usually entail, whatever their national setting: hypocrisy, dodging the present and maintaining power.

Third: there is the problem of the nonconformist. This is a standard critique of relativism.³⁹ As individuals grow up, the societies in which they live clearly help to shape the development of their views: but people can decide to accept or resist the dominant attitudes of their society. If they do reject them, are they to be regarded as inauthentic, mistaken, stupid or mentally ill? One hopes not. Rather than castigating the nonconformist who rejects cultural 'Back to Basics', I prefer George Bernard Shaw's verdict that 'all great truths begin as blasphemy'. Toleration, nationalism, democracy, reason, rights, love—readers can take their pick—were all humanly invented, against the social grain, by nonconformists who resisted the basics of their time.

Fourth: the problem of 'blackboxing' (seeing complex structures as simple unitary phenomena). Some international relations specialists, having learned not to blackbox states, now tend to blackbox 'cultures' and 'society'. But cultures are complex and multifaceted; they are no more unitary phenomena than 'states' are. Consequently, when talking about human rights we should avoid essentializing cultures as much as we should reject the idea of seeing states as unitary rational textbook actors. Capitalist elites in 'world cities', for example, have more in common with each other than with 'progressive' opinion in their various 'cultures'. At the same time the values represented by human rights organizations, ecological groups and so on resonate across cultures. So do some political sympathies. People everywhere cheered as families were reunited when the Berlin Wall was opened up, as the Chinese student danced a potential waltz of death with the tank in Tiananmen Square, and as the dignified Nelson Mandela emerged from prison and helped bring about an almost unbelievable transformation of a vicious and marauding regime. Unremarkable and remarkable events can reveal common universal spirits. The assertion that cosmopolitan sentiments are the exclusive privilege of 'people with passports' living in 'secure nation-states'⁴⁰ overlooks how commonplace passports are today, the potential world society of transcultural sympathizers and the growing densification of contacts and support for transnational non-government organizations working on behalf of such world-order values as humane governance, economic sustainability, non-violence, human rights and environmental protection.⁴¹ Blackboxing cultures plays into the hands of the powerful, plays down multiple identities and overlooks transcultural ties and sympathies. Class, gender and religion all provide warnings against the

³⁸ A. Robson, 'Torture not culture', *AIBS Journal*, September/October 1993, pp. 8–9.

³⁹ Peter Singer, *Practical ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 4–7.

⁴⁰ These were the arguments of Michael Ignatieff on 'Analysis', BBC Radio 4, 5 May 1994.

⁴¹ On these see, for example, Richard Falk, *The promise of world order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

blackboxing of cultures, and feminist theorizing is particularly helpful in breaking down essentializing tendencies. If 'cultures' are complex and multifaceted, it should go without saying that 'civilizations' are even more so. Yet some, now the morality play of the Cold War has ended, seem determined to replace it by new dramas between clashing stereotypes.⁴²

Fifth: the international politics of relativism/post-modernism is undermined by its own critique. Post-modernism is an anti-metanarrative metanarrative. Its political logic is that of universal toleration (once a bold and original idea, and still not universal). If one scratches a committed post-modernist one will almost certainly find a comfortably off Western urban liberal. Those who live against the wall, or who have emancipated themselves from such a position, do not hold these views. At British International Studies Association conferences, we do not have panels endorsing post-modern ethics organized by formerly footbound Chinese women. Nor are they organized by those ANC supporters who identified with the metanarrative and world-wide political movement against racism. The reason for this is obvious, and relates to the fact that post-modernism—certainly that of a doctrinaire variety—does not deliver an ethics for the emancipation of victims across the world. Therefore, as long as the world is full of victims, it is an approach which will not become universal.

At the nastiest edge, the international politics of relativism is justified by tyrants who want to stay on top of their own piles, free from outside interference. The relativist/post-modern/communitarian condition of international relations was classically instituted by the Peace of Westphalia: *cuius regio, eius religio*—in other words power, authenticity and sovereignty. It was a tyrant's charter, as well as one for embryonic liberals.

There are no archimedean human rights points within cultures, only contested, historically more-or-less powerful aggregations of ideas. The geography of an idea is interesting, but not nearly so interesting as its role in the universe of ideas contributing, or not, to human emancipation; and these are geographically 'promiscuous'. There is always space for cosmopolitan ideas and the reaffirmation of value.

Hopes for cosmopolitan politics and values can begin in the very weaknesses of the hostile alternative arguments—a reversal of the usual position. The clinching communitarian argument is often thought to be the fact that cosmopolitanism is not, and has never been, universally politically powerful. This, of course, has been the case with all (subsequently) important ideas (remember Shaw's adage). Further, we should naturally expect communitarian outlooks to be dominant, since they are part of the ideology of statism (the idea that all decision-making power and loyalty is necessarily and properly focused on the state); they have had a 350-year run, backed by state power, during which people have learned to consider them 'natural'. States have not existed, for the most part, to promote loyalties beyond themselves.

The anti-cosmopolitan argument is at present thought to be strengthened by the very dubious and dangerous cliché that is gaining ground to the effect that

⁴² Samuel P. Huntington, 'The clash of civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72: 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22–49.

the world political situation today is much more dangerous and unstable than during the Cold War. Pundits preen themselves using labels such as 'new world disorder'. The cliché is simplistic and unhistorical. It rests on three main assertions: (1) there has been an increase in conflict around the world; (2) the collapse of the Soviet Union has produced unprecedented instability; and (3) there has been a surge of nationalism which greatly increases the level of disorder. These assertions can be quickly countered, but not easily set aside, since they have taken on a life of their own. I shall address them in turn.

(1) The world has not seen a sharp increase in armed conflict since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, the number of wars each decade since 1945 has been quite stable. According to one source there are at present thirty-five 'wars', all of which are taking place within single states, though there is external intervention in a significant number.⁴³ Of these, only eight broke out in or after 1989 (Papua New Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, Croatia, Bosnia, Haiti, Georgia and Tajikistan). The other twenty-seven began during the Cold War; many were arguably exacerbated by it, and have been prolonged because of the weaponry and other support given to Cold War proxies such as UNITA in Angola or the *mujahedin* in Afghanistan. There are some brutal conflicts today, but none as large as the wars in Korea, Vietnam or the Middle East during the Cold War. The Cold War order was far more dangerous for far more people. The post-Cold War world has seen new troublespots flare up, but it has also seen remarkable progress towards the settling of apparently 'intractable' conflicts, such as those in Israel, South Africa and Northern Ireland.

(2) There is undoubtedly serious instability attendant upon the collapse of the Soviet empire. So far the violence and disorder has been limited and localized, and nowhere near the scale of that which accompanied the prolonged and bloody collapse of the British empire, which is so often taken as a model for the orderly retreat of an imperial power. As yet, the former Soviet empire has not witnessed anything comparable (and one hopes it never will) to the uncounted number of deaths (half a million is just one estimate) resulting from the British withdrawal from the Indian subcontinent. From the 1940s to the present day British history has been marked by a series of small wars, as the former imperial power reluctantly released its hold. Over seventy years after the Easter Rising, there are still deaths in Ireland and Britain. Will there be fighting between the Russians and nationalist armies in the Caucasus in 2050? Meanwhile, the transfer of power in eastern Europe continues with remarkable orderliness, when seen in historical perspective, and set against the radical political, social and economic dislocation in every country. 'Bosnia' is not an icon of our time, or the region; it is a warning and a lesson.

(3) Nationalism is more salient than during the Cold War in some respects, but not in others, when one considers the global nationalist upsurge during the decades following the Second World War, which helped bring about the end of

⁴³ Ernie Regehr, 'Warfare's new face', *World Press Review*, 41: 4, April 1994 (reprinted from *The Toronto Star*), pp. 14–15.

the colonial era. Furthermore, the present salience of nationalism should not be identified crudely with 'fragmentation' and 'instability'. In recent years there have broadly been two types of nationalist reassertion. In the first case there have been nations seeking to free themselves from a multi-nation state or empire dominated by a single nation or power. This was the case in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Nations wished (wish) to free themselves in order to become a 'normal country' in the world economy and on the Western model. 'Fragmentation' here is entirely compatible with 'integration' (as with the east European countries wanting to join the EU). In the second case, nationalists (usually in developing countries) seek to resist the over-rapid intrusion of 'international' (that is, 'modern') forces into traditional societies. Stability, in these instances, is the explicit aim of nationalism, though stability of a particular kind. When one listens to pundits speaking of 'Bosnia' and 'Rwanda' one would suppose that these cases were typical of how 'nationalists' behave in the post-Cold War era; yet when one actually looks at specific cases, there are very few choosing the medieval path into the twenty-first century.

Without wishing to minimize the seriousness of conflicts and other situations in several parts of the world, then, the evidence does not sustain the cliché of new world disorder. There is therefore no reason to feel nostalgic for the Cold War, or to believe that global trends leave us no course other than to give way to the parochial politics of the locally powerful, the stunted philosophical outlooks of the communitarians or the excited agendas of the fragmentation-, disorder- and tribalization-mongers.

Set against the powerful clichés which help sustain statist outlooks, there is not only the revelation of more variegated evidence, there is also a variety of historical and contemporary theories which promote cosmopolitan values and ideas about human emancipation. They offer radically different perspectives on the potentialities for politics on a global scale. Of particular significance, and covering a range of areas of attitude and behaviour, are Rorty's 'transcultural education of the sentiments'; the affinities evident in common cultural myths of origin and folk wisdom; the family of ethical ideas shared by major religions; Kantian-style thinking about reason; Habermas's communicative truths; universal language structures; Falkian world order values; growing world views (and even species awareness); an embryonic global civil society; a global discourse of human rights; and so on.⁴⁴ Here are ideas, visions, beliefs and philosophies on which a humane global politics can be built by cosmopolitanizing our sentiments,

⁴⁴ For an introduction to the range of theories in this paragraph, see, *inter alia*, Richard Rorty, 'Human rights, rationality and sentimentality', in Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley, eds, *On human rights* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), pp. 111–35; Michael Jordan, *Myths of the world* (London: Kyle Cathie, 1993); Ninian Smart, *The religious experience of mankind* (London: Fontana, 1977); Reiss, ed., *Kant's political writings*; Jürgen Habermas, *The theory of communicative action*, 2 vols (Oxford: Polity, 1984); Steven Pinker, *The language instinct: the new science of language and mind* (London: Allen Lane, 1994); Richard Falk, *Explorations at the edge of time* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Elise Boulding, *Building a global civic culture* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988); Paul Ekins, *A new world order* (London: Routledge, 1992); A. H. Robertson, *Human rights in the world*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 3rd edn., 1992, rev. by J. G. Merrills).

consciences, values, interests, horizons, behaviours and ideologies. Nobody need subscribe to every element of these theories, but it is difficult to believe that there would not be something within the range with which most could identify. At base, as Rorty argues, we all know what it is like to be among strangers, or to be in a family.⁴⁵

Against the destructive and dismal rationality of Westphalia, Machiavelli and Clausewitz, which has shaped the statist outlooks of this and earlier centuries, the theories just identified lead to more helpful stories and ideas about the world out of which and for which we need to fashion the axioms of a new rationality for the next century. Humans are a meaning-creating species and there are stories with the potential to foster shared (complex) identities rather than mistrusting (rigid) ones.

If we put these cosmopolitan theories together, we do not get an archimedean point—that would be asking too much (the human condition seems too complex)—but we do get a set of universalist perspectives on the human story and human potential. These offer promising anchorages for thinking about security, community and emancipation as we contemplate navigating the next stage of history. For sail we must, and without certainty. Some of the anchorages will be left behind, but they will have served their ‘cosmopolitan utopia[n]’ purpose.⁴⁶

I am very confident that enough people across the world have the potential moral muscle for this cosmopolitan project. That they have some moral muscle is evident in peoples’ key relationships with their nearest and dearest, and their discharge of immediate social obligations. The problem is that this moral muscle is not sufficiently exercised; it is not yet well developed when it comes to distant events. But there is no logical or physiological reason to suppose moral muscle has a ‘natural’ limit, at the state boundary. It only has the limit it has, which is the product of history. A few generations of cosmopolitan aerobics, to break through the traditionalist moral boundaries set down over the centuries, could change matters dramatically. A different discourse of international relations—as global moral science—would be exercise in the right direction. There is some space, however minuscule, for each individual on earth to make decisions about the direction of the next part of the human story.

At bottom, the falsity of the communitarian political philosophy is that it tries to persuade us that we have a true (communitarian) self as opposed to a false (cosmopolitan) self. Since the ‘self’ is an evolutionary (historical) phenomenon, I believe this is a fundamentally untenable position. It is too soon in history to say that we cannot have a cosmopolitan self. How can we possibly know, so early in the human race?

The cosmopolitanism being advanced here and elsewhere these days is not the same as sameness. It entails what has been called ‘sensitive universalism’, with a dialogue between universal values and local definitions. The enemy of

⁴⁵ Rorty, ‘Human rights’, pp. 133–4.

⁴⁶ See Rorty’s comments on Plato and Kant, *ibid.*, pp. 119–20.

cosmopolitanism is statism, not people's attachment to the familiar. In any case, cosmopolitanism-as-sameness would not work. It has to be advanced in a multicultural and multi-state world. The work of John Vincent on human rights and Bikhu Parekh on democratic government both exhibit this realization.⁴⁷ Their work seeks universal regulative principles to enable people(s) to play the game of common humanity, but at the same time seeks to be accommodating to cultural diversity and the wish for political autonomy. In the tension between these objectives, we come up against the dilemmas of intervention versus non-intervention.

Intervention and international society

The traditional arguments about non-intervention need not be rehearsed here, since John Vincent's work—especially his first and now standard book, the fruits of his PhD—does it with more richness than any.⁴⁸ Non-intervention, for various reasons, remained John's basic position and it is one I share, though more on practical than on principled grounds. I have rather less faith than John had in the prospect of the international society egg-box being able to create the conditions for turning bad eggs into good. Indeed, since power tends to corrupt, the opposite is more likely to be the case. Consequently a progressive agent is required, and for me it exists most consistently at present in the form of transnational social movements committed to world-order values. John Vincent recognized the role they could play, of course; but his work emphasizes the constraints of living within—and therefore the need to work through—the statist framework of international relations.

When states collapse, foreign governments can generally do little to resolve civil wars, once they have escalated into their customary incivility, without paying a price they are rarely prepared to pay; and even then 'success' is by no means guaranteed. It is salutary to remind those who would have rushed to send large numbers of international peace-enforcers into the Balkan imbroglio not only of the sorry outcome of the peacekeeping operation in the simpler scenario of Somalia, but also of the fact that even Tito, with his dictatorial will, his legitimacy, his local knowledge, his staying power and his authoritarian structures could not create an effective polity that long outlasted him. If he and his regime could not do it, over three decades and more, what reason is there to suppose that any committee of UN or NATO officials or governments could, in a shorter period? Outsiders can help in important ways, but ultimately the people on the ground have to make the decision as to whether and how they will live together. This means, difficult as it may be sometimes, that outsiders must be patient, and accept their limitations. The desire to 'do something' has to

⁴⁷ Vincent, *Human rights and international relations*; Bikhu Parekh, 'The cultural particularity of liberal democracy', in David Held, ed., *Prospects for democracy* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), pp. 156–75.

⁴⁸ Vincent, *Non-intervention and international order*.

be tempered by the knowledge that not only may it not be possible to 'solve' a historic conflict by a short and dramatic military intervention, but that it may well make matters worse. What can always be done, however, is to accept as a duty the obligation to do what one can to prevent the generation of such conflicts in future.⁴⁹ This was Aristotle's rather than Plato's way of dealing with Thrasymachus and Callicles.⁵⁰ Rather than trying to persuade such mature but unreasonable individuals of the folly of their ways, Aristotle believed that it was better to accept that nothing much could be done with them, and instead invest effort in avoiding having children who would be like them. There are parallels in international relations. In some regional conflicts, civil wars and massive violations of human rights, it is not politically possible to fast-forward history.

Foreign governments do have a range of other policy options, however. They can try to isolate a conflict, try to prevent escalation, keep the peace if there is one to keep, promote negotiations, feed the hungry, attend to other humanitarian obligations, learn lessons, develop conflict prevention measures, and occasionally provide safe havens. But sadly there is usually little else to be done. The injection of international military force to impose a resolution on a bitter conflict is likely to be a slippery slope, and probably an ineffective instrument. So-called humanitarian war is not much to my taste—though it sounds an improvement on most other types of war—since it smacks of a secularized version of the just war doctrine, which history shows can justify anything.⁵¹

We could be much more confident about military intervention/peace enforcement by the 'international community' if this so-called international community were more than a term of propaganda used by the governments of the G7 states.⁵² There is some sense of community among the liberal democratic countries, but for the most part the phrase 'international community' is a platitude, trotted out by the powerful when they want to legitimize a particular action. The 'international community' label of the G7 global protection racket is by no means the worst international order imaginable, but it falls far short of the ideal of a 'community'. The latter is a term of hypocrisy when attached to a situation in which the powerful in the G7 prosper beyond historic dreams, while tens of millions elsewhere live utterly wretched lives. The cosy phrase 'international community' often represents the diplomatic equivalent of honour among thieves. Look at some heads of government or heads of state. Can we hope that this 'community' of dignitaries and states will deliver the world from massive human wrongs? We clearly cannot, since these same dignitaries and states are often a serious part of the problem.

⁴⁹ This argument is expanded in Ken Booth, 'Military intervention: duty and prudence', in *Political Quarterly*, special issue 'Military intervention in European conflicts', edited by Lawrence Freedman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 56–75.

⁵⁰ Rorty, 'Human rights', p. 123.

⁵¹ Donald A. Wells, 'How much can the "just war" justify?', *Journal of Philosophy*, 66: 23, December 1969, pp. 819–29.

⁵² Booth, 'Military intervention', esp. pp. 56–60.

The 'international community' does not live up to its name for five main reasons.

First, it is based on states, and we should not be seduced by what has been called the 'romance of the nation-state'.⁵³ The states-system, edified into the notion of a society of states, legitimizes all manner of quasi-states and tyrants. A recent survey by the Redress Trust of the treatment of prisoners listed 123 out of the 183 member states of the United Nations as practising some form of torture or ill-treatment of prisoners.⁵⁴ The 1993 annual report of Amnesty International spoke of human rights violations 'on a terrifying scale', recording violations in 161 states, and noting that when protest is silent it provides 'a shield behind which governments believe they can order the secret police, the torturers and state assassins into action with impunity'.⁵⁵ Such abusers of human rights are unlikely to be the eradicators of human wrongs.

Second, the international community is not in a real sense a 'community' because there is minimal reciprocity. Take the United Nations as the litmus test. The powerful welcome the UN when it is not democratic (but is effective for their interests), but ignore or reject it when it is democratic (when, for example, the Third World has a voice and calls for economic justice) and in those cases ensure as far as possible that the UN is not effective. The contrast between President Reagan's arrogant hostility towards the UN and President Bush's born-again euphoria was a reflection of political cynicism, not an outbreak of community-mindedness.

Third, the governments who run the 'international community' have a poor record when it comes to being other-regarding towards people(s) as opposed to other governments. There is a society of *states*, and within this governments turn a blind eye to the aggression of their friends,⁵⁶ regardless of the consequences for 'other' people. Western governments—from whom we expect most—do not appear through their policies to be other-regarding except to governments; nor have I much reason to believe that individuals within those governments spend much time agonizing over the fate of wretched foreigners—except, perhaps, those whose personal or group plight is particularly photogenic—when the streets of their own capital cities are so frequently paved with homeless.

Fourth, most governments as a matter of course behave selfishly (which should be carefully distinguished from proper self-interest).⁵⁷ When they act to uphold international law they act *in accordance with* the law, not *out of respect* for it. A real community would require the latter. It would mean, for example, that governments would oppose the aggression of their 'friends' as well as that of

⁵³ David Luban, 'The romance of the nation-state', in C. R. Beitz *et al.*, eds, *International ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 238–43.

⁵⁴ Owen Bowecott, 'Torture pacts honoured in breach', *Guardian*, 5 April 1994.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Tetzlaff, *Human rights and development*, pp. 16–17.

⁵⁶ A relentless critic of Western policy in this regard (with respect most prominently to Israel, South Africa and Indonesia) has been Noam Chomsky, *Deterring democracy* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁵⁷ The distinction is discussed in Booth, 'Military intervention', pp. 56–9.

those of which they disapproved. The politics of selfishness is often best evident in small things, since the major powers tend to get their way in the large ones anyway. Look at the 'piracy' by the US Coast Guard in the High Seas at the start of 1994 when, contrary to international law, Haitian boats were seized, forcibly returned and destroyed.⁵⁸ In a different sphere, look at the selfish aid politics evident in the Pergau Dam affair, which exposed the British government's priorities when it came to serving the truly needy.⁵⁹

Fifth, the international system—in the guise of the society of states—has not been normatively successful after 350 years. It would be very instructive for that body of Anglo-American professors of international relations for whom international society seems to be in good shape at the end of the twentieth century to read Jeremy Seabrook's excellent work of reporting, *Victims of development*.⁶⁰ This book gives revealing accounts of real lives in real places in that real world which academic international relations realists disregard. It is a book which leaves us nowhere to hide. The same is true, for somewhat different reasons, of Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, beaches and bases*.⁶¹ One always hopes for governments to act as 'local agents of the world common good', to use Hedley Bull's striking phrase, and occasionally one gets it. But not often. Power tends to corrupt, and this is a deadly combination with sovereignty. Even a good government, as they say in Featherstone, is still a bloody government.

Is international society in good shape at the end of the twentieth century? *Good shape for whom?* is the key—uncomfortable—question. It is not in good shape for the workers in the Rubberworld factory in Manila, the 'shifted cultivators' of Africa, or the ancillary workers in the Bhilai steel plant in Chattisgarh. It is in even worse shape for the families living on the sulphurous garbage dump of 'Smokey Mountain' or the street children of Rio (murdered so that the tourists can better enjoy the view).⁶² Nor is it, or the international political economy with which it is associated, in good shape in terms of protecting the growth and diversity of the natural world, of which human society is a part and on which it utterly depends. International society is not in good shape, if measured by what it is not doing. At this moment, many millions of people are living lives more wretched, hopeless and meaningless than any in our worst visions of nineteenth-century industrial Britain—or, I dare say, Jefferson's slaves. The destruction of nature proceeds at an alarming rate, some of it (as with the extinction of unique genetic material) irreparably. In terms of spreading the good life, Westphalia is another of the West's failures.

⁵⁸ Hugh O'Shaughnessy, 'UN must get rid of Haiti's bullyboys', *Observer*, 20 February 1994, p. 20.

⁵⁹ Among the criticisms of the British government's policy in the Pergau Dam affair, see Michael Durham and Dean Nelson, 'The tangled web of arms and British aid', *Observer*, 6 February 1994, p. 18; and Tony German, 'The hand that feeds itself', *Guardian*, 11 February 1994, pp. 14–15.

⁶⁰ Jeremy Seabrook, *Victims of development: resistance and alternatives* (London: Verso, 1993).

⁶¹ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, beaches and bases: making feminist sense of international politics* (London: Pandora, 1989).

⁶² These examples are from Seabrook, *Victims of development*.

If governments cannot make a better job of the ethicscape of the twenty-first century than their record threatens, a major responsibility therefore passes to what James Rosenau calls 'sovereignty free' agents, in order to build up transcultural moral and political solidarities. Such organizations, together with individuals—as cosmopolitan agents—have become much more skilled for this task (with fax machines and the rest) than ever in the past.⁶³ Governments do sometimes listen to non-governmental organizations and other representatives of global civil society; and if things are to improve, they must.

Such arguments as those above leave me open to the familiar charge of naivety, for exaggerating the potential *to* change and the potential *of* change from below. But who knows what might be the effect of 350 years of skilled cosmopolitanism under conditions of globalization? To my mind, the true naivety at the end of the twentieth century is to believe that human society can continue to live indefinitely the way it is.

The study of international relations

What does all this mean, finally, for academic international relations? I have listed a series of wrongs: the subject is full of wrongs because it does not give an accurate view of the world, it has taken some false turns and it is functioning inadequately; and the subject-matter is full of wrongs in terms of the multitudes tortured or starved, humiliated or hurt, and hated or neglected instead of loved and attended to.

Up to the time of the much-maligned Enlightenment we could blame God for some or all of these wrongs. Some still do. I prefer to see these wrongs as human choices and failures (with the dark side of the Enlightenment being as nothing compared with the dark side of un-Enlightenment). A mixture of our theories and historical happenstance got us here, and only better theories (and luck) can get us out. In this respect I share Mary Midgley's view that thinking about how to live is a more basic and urgent use of the intellect than the discovery of new facts (though trying to understand the world more accurately is a condition of benevolent change);⁶⁴ and with Edward Said I share the conviction that the honourable role for the intellectual is that of outsider.⁶⁵

If the study of international relations is to develop along the lines suggested, then one of its tasks must be to reconsider its past. If they do this, students will find that what grew into Cold War international relations does not relate to the subject's beginnings as unambiguously as they have been led to suppose.⁶⁶

⁶³ James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in world politics* (Brighton: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1990), esp. ch. 13, 'Powerful people'.

⁶⁴ Midgley, *Wisdom*, p. 21.

⁶⁵ Edward Said, *Representations of the intellectual* (London: Vintage, 1994).

⁶⁶ This is expanded in Ken Booth, '75 years on: the subject's future as the re-writing of its past', in Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski, eds, *International political theory: positivism and after* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

Indeed, over the years international relations has become distorted by the powerful myths of its disciplinary foundation. It is interesting to speculate about the extent to which our sense of what we do as academics would have been different had the subject been founded in universities not by a Liberal MP in mid-Wales (David Davies) in the aftermath of the Great War,⁶⁷ but instead by Dr Zungu, the admirable feminist medic she-Chief of the Zulus.⁶⁸ The apparent preposterousness to most Western academic minds of such a disciplinary beginning is itself a powerful signifier of the ethnocentric, masculinized, northern and top-down character of our subject. Powerful foundational myths have anchored our subject in the study of war and in a deeply masculinized and Westernized outlook on human wrongs.

War obviously remains a scourge, a fascination, and an area for study and control; but why not hunger, or oppression? The Save the Children Fund reckons that 13,000 children die daily from diarrhoea, yet could be saved by a simple daily 10p sachet of salts and sugar.⁶⁹ Another source estimates 40,000 daily childhood deaths in total from preventable diseases and malnutrition (this is a figure which, if extrapolated, exceeds the annual average daily death toll in the Second World War).⁷⁰ On 6 June 1994 we commemorated D-Day, when about 10,000 allied servicemen lost their lives. Every day is D-Day—Disease Day, Distress Day, Death Day—for four times that number of the world's children.

In such circumstances, to say that international society is in good shape is as misleading as it would be for a social worker to describe a couple as having a good relationship because they had ceased battering each other, even though the children were being badly neglected. Deprived children are the result of parents not playing happy families, just as global human wrongs are the result of political units playing selfish national interest politics rather than the game of common humanity.

Academically, we continue to prioritize arenas in world politics made for 'soldiers and diplomats' (Raymond Aron's shorthand for the subject) as opposed to those for nurses and teachers. The former resonate with the subject's foundational myths, whereas the latter make us ask uncomfortable questions about ourselves, our liberal societies and the capitalist world we dominate.

It is not only our subject's origins we should re-evaluate, but also our ideas about the earliest origins of humanity. This might in turn revolutionize our image of our subject and of ourselves. Recent anthropological evidence has discovered that *homo erectus* was a scavenger, and before that a vegetarian.⁷¹ This

⁶⁷ See Brian Porter, 'Holders of the Woodrow Wilson Chair', in Brian Porter, ed., *The Aberystwyth papers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 361–90.

⁶⁸ Profiled in *Beloved country*, BBC 2, 21 April 1994.

⁶⁹ Save the Children, 'Saving lives with salt and sugar', *Observer*, March 1994.

⁷⁰ See Johan Galtung, 'Peace', in Joel Krieger, ed., *The Oxford companion to the politics of the world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 688.

⁷¹ The state of the debate is popularly summarized in Michael D. Lemonick, 'How man began', *Time*, 14 March 1994, pp. 42–9.

is not our self-image of Man the Hunter who became Man the Warrior who became Man the IR specialist. We now have deeply ingrained masculinist images of our history; the mythology has become naturalized. The historically constituted self-images we have of our species are such that today we could no more imagine a best-selling book with the title *Conan the vegetarian* than our ancestors could have imagined that people one day would live in 'nations', or decide on their leaders by putting an X on a piece of paper.

If we delve far enough backwards we will develop a less essentialist—as well as a less violent—view of human 'nature'. This exercise will help us recognize that we invent our own meanings and so make our own nature. We are constrained by old stories and theories, but not determined by them. We can create new ones; and this is where Eduardo Rabossi's term 'human rights culture',⁷² and global moral science, come in. A fresh look at the distant past might help to encourage the replacing of pervasive self-images such as those of Golding's *Lord of the flies* and Rousseau's staghunt with the curiously moral tale of the survivors of the 1972 Andean air crash, who cooperated, lived ethically, scavenged, ate human flesh, and survived with dignity.⁷³ Human 'nature' is there to be written, and rewritten, and reinventing our human future will be shaped by whether and how we reinterpret the past. And it is the future of the next few tumultuous generations that specialists in world politics must desperately worry about, because if it all goes wrong few will have the luxury of speculating about the eternal questions concerning philosophical foundations.⁷⁴

There is much to be done in our subject. It is potentially the site of the most interesting and important questions in the human sciences, and I believe that John Vincent, had he lived, would have been a key figure in shaping our thoughts. His own work stands as one person's attempt to grapple with the big questions of his subject. What will also stand is the real affection in which he was held by colleagues and students. He touched people's lives, including those who did not know him well, like myself. John asked himself the toughest questions and in so doing did not choose the path that gave the brain an easy ride. In these different ways his work inspires us and his life encourages us to believe that the job we are doing can be important as well as interesting. He made the world—the world he touched—a better place. We all have some space; and if we could all hope to do the same in the worlds we touch, our subject would be braver, human potential greater, and perhaps world politics freer of human wrongs.

⁷² Quoted in Rorty, 'Human rights', p. 115.

⁷³ Re-enacted in the film *Alive*, released 1993.

⁷⁴ On the outmoded search for foundations, see Rorty, 'Human rights', esp. pp. 116, 121–2.